

Correspondence.

A NATURAL HISTORY STANDARD COLOUR-CHART.

To the Editors of "The Emu."

DEAR SIRs,—The need of a universal and uniform method of describing the colours of birds' plumage and soft parts and their eggs, as well as of all other natural history specimens, has been apparent to me for some time. We cannot be too precise in dealing with the varying phases of nature, and any movement aiming at precision of description must commend itself to those engaged in research work. The inadequate and indefinite method of expressing the true colours of natural history specimens has in the past caused and is at the present time creating confusion, which gives rise to the introduction of baneful synonyms, leading to misconceptions and re-descriptions. This clogs the wheels of scientific investigation and retards research. The patience of earnest workers when comparing and naming specimens is often sorely taxed in their attempts to fathom the published descriptions given by their scientific predecessors. A colour-chart approved by a conference of leading scientists would be indeed a boon to both systematists and, especially, to field workers. Both would have a common and a uniform method, readily understood by either, if aided by such a chart. There should be no insuperable difficulties to be overcome in arriving at unanimity in this direction, at least as far as Great Britain and her oversea dominions are concerned. I should suggest that delegates be appointed by all the scientific societies of Great Britain to draw up a colour scheme. This body could be assisted by expert colourists in arriving at a comprehensive scheme of colouration, which could then be accepted as a standard and act as an official scientific colour-chart. I feel assured that there would be throughout the world a large demand for such a book, especially if constructed of a size that could readily be carried about in the pocket. A pocket chart would be of inestimable value if used in the field, since the colours of specimens as found in life could thereby be faithfully recorded, while it would also to some extent prevent destruction of life. I should also suggest that the official names of the colours be printed in several languages. Each distinct colour should be numbered, and each colour further separated, say, by suitable lines, according to its varied shades, which could be lettered. Were this done, the numbers and letters of the official chart need only be given when recording data. The advantages to be derived from the use of such a system are apparent.

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Melbourne, Australia, 1/4/09.